

Sermon: Lent 2

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Year C
Genesis 15:1-12,17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

In Genesis... in the creation story... God affirmed... several times... the unfolding creation as good... the earth as good... the plants and animals as good... and human kind as good... and when God was finished... and looked at all that God had created... God called it... very good...

But in Romans 7: Paul wrote... *I do not understand my own actions... for I do not do the good I want... but I do the very thing I hate... the evil I do not want... is what I do...*

And many of us know... that St. Augustine of Hippo... who had his own moral struggles... is credited with the idea of original sin... which resulted from The Fall... and into which each of us is born... and so we too struggle... with questions about whether we are intrinsically good... or intrinsically evil... about the kinds of things with which we are tempted... and whether we can only choose good with God's help... with God's grace... and we struggle with who we listen to... who we allow to... who we empower to... call us back from the wilderness... from wildness... to sanity... to not hating what we do...

I've said before... that although there are consequences to the things we do individually... God is far more concerned with the corporate things we choose to do... or choose not to do... and I just have to wonder... if because the world's population is so much larger than it was when scripture was written... and because communication and travel are both comparatively... so much more immediate now compared to then... that the corporate consequences... of our collective actions rain down on us... more quickly... more surprisingly... and seemingly... more out of nowhere...

You know that on Friday morning... at least 49 people were killed... and 39 others seriously wounded in shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand... the worst shooting in that nation's history... a self-proclaimed white supremacist... believed his was the prophetic message to which the world ought to listen... his seventy-four page manifesto... which objected to immigration and multiculturalism... and decried the decaying culture of the white... European... Western... world... hailed our President as... quote... "a symbol of renewed white identity... and common purpose"...

And in Washington... in response... there was some mincing of words... although he was clear in condemning the killings... our President did not deliver any message of empathy or support to American Muslims... and he did not condemn the white nationalism which led to this act of terrorism... as our churches condemn it... as our churches lament it... and this tear in the fabric of our shared humanity... goes back to the father of our faiths... Abram...

Abram... whose name means *exalted ancestor*... is lamenting that he has no son of his own... although Ch. 13 tells us that Abram is very rich in livestock... gold... and silver... and although God has already promised to make his offspring like the dust of the earth... which cannot be counted... Abram laments because his estate will go to a child who is not his own... to a slave born in his house... but God honors God's promise... in Ch. 16... Hagar bears Abram a son named Ishmael... whose descendants... in v. 10 we read... *cannot be counted for multitude*... and in Islam... Ishmael is regarded as a prophet... and as an ancestor to Muhammad... the founder of that faith... and in Ch. 17... God re-names Abram... Abraham... when God tells him again... that he shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations... and Abraham means... *ancestor of a multitude*...

Jerusalem means *city of peace*... but Jesus is warned that Herod is out to get him... Jesus continues on... dissuaded by that possibility... his work is not yet finished... he pushes on to do as much as he is able... he can see the potential... the possibilities of

what can be accomplished... he tells the Pharisees to let Herod know that he is manifesting the prophets' vision of God's kingdom... but he laments... because he knows there is so much resistance to what God invites us to... so much ladder climbing... and authority invoking... and power holding on to... and mincing of words... so as to avoid God's words... so much resistance to being shepherd watched... or wing protected...

Not to smother... not to stifle... but to guard us from the things about which Paul wrote... the evil we do... the sin we commit... the missing of God's mark for us...

Not so we can be belittled... or held back... or hamstrung... but so that we can grow into the people... and the heavenly community... to which we are destined... but we are still in formation... and God will not force God's will on us... that kind of forcing... before we are ready... would be like forcing a caterpillar to become a butterfly without the cocoon... but when we bad mouth... when we talk about how we can do without cocoons ... when we hold on to our caterpillar state at all costs... we are unable to fly... and we kill the prophets who talk about the transformative wonder of dying to ourselves so we can become magical... winged creatures... and Jesus laments that Jerusalem kills the prophets...

Before he became Presiding Bishop... when he served a church in N. Carolina... The Rev. Michael Curry wrote that for Luke... a central message and recurring theme... was the same one for African slaves of the antebellum south... they had to stretch the contours of their social reality... into a new kingdom that was not controlled by the powers... the Herods... of this world... Curry wrote that Jesus speaks in tones of abject disappointment and utter heartbreak at the refusal of his own people to hear and heed to summons of God to draw near... to come home... and to be gathered under God's wings... so that we may become...

All together... we are like stonemasons... or woodcarvers... who have committed to help a great cathedral come into being... it will take hundreds of years... at least... for the work to be done... and we can do only our small part... for the length of our days...

but unless each person who is needed... commits and remains faithful to the task at hand... unless we pay attention to how we do what we do... and why we do it... unless we seek to improve our ways... and repair our mistakes when we make them... and unless we follow the design of the architect... what we'll end up with... will be a hodgepodge of self-assertion... of short-sighted interpretation... and of misaligned priorities... and the fullness of the cathedral's design will never be achieved... and God will never be worshipped there... as intended...

But God has given humanity... given us... almost unfathomable self-determinative power... we can remain slaves to the way things are... and allow the Herods of the world to continue inciting division... and accusation... and tribalism... which is what Satan invited Jesus to do in the wilderness... we can trumpet the supremacy of our race... of our religion... of our denomination... both individually and corporately... we can accept without question the hypocrisy of condemning murder without also condemning the thinking which motivates it... and we can decide that we want building God's kingdom to take much longer... regardless of the collateral damage that it causes...

Or we can choose to align ourselves with the indivisible unity of the Godhead... and let that be the model for how we behave... and for the choices we make... and we can decide that we want to build God's kingdom more quickly... by speaking the truth that God favors diversity... because there is no evidence to the contrary... because God loves people and things by becoming them...

And we may need to acknowledge that the work to which we are called... is difficult work... but that doesn't excuse us from engaging it... and God is infinitely patient in waiting on us...

I believe in original blessing... I believe we are good people... who sometimes make ill-advised... and mis-informed... choices... especially when we feel like it's all up to us... but as Acts 2:17 says... *in the last days... it will be... God declares... that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh... and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...*

During the remainder of Lent... we can pray... we can shine a light into our own dark places... we can let our elected officials know what we think and how we feel and what our values are... what our Episcopal and Lutheran values are... we can look around and see just how far into the wilderness we have wandered... and we can ask the Spirit... to please... guide us back home... Holy God... make it so...

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